MONTANA WILDLIFE AND TRANSPORTATION

DATA AND INFORMATION WORK GROUP

Meeting Notes

July 16, 2020

Purpose: To complete a vision statement and the start of a work plan that clearly describes what the work group will accomplish and how they will complete the work.

Objectives:

- Agree to a vision statement, goals, and objectives for the work group
- Create a work plan (or at least the start of a work plan)
- Decide on meeting logistics

Attendees:

- D&I Work Group: Paul Sturm (MDT), Gabe Priebe (MDT), Brian Andersen (MDT), Liz Fairbank (MSWP), Joshua Theurer (MSWP), Andrew Jakes (MSWP), Justin Gude (FWP), Adam Messer (FWP)
- Planning and Implementation Team (PIT Crew): Renee Lemon (FWP), Nick Clarke (MSWP), Hannah Jaicks (MSWP)

Agenda:

1. **Introduction**
    - The PIT Crew went over the purpose and objectives of the meeting and noted the next Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee meeting is August 5, which is an opportunity to get the committee's feedback on the vision for the Data and Information Work Group.

2. **Vision statement, goals, objectives**
    - Justin proposed the work group could prioritize highway stretches where wildlife accommodations on highways are needed. This would result in a map of priority areas for wildlife accommodations and areas where there is not sufficient data or data gaps. Priority areas would be based on a set of criteria. For each criterion, one or more data sources would be used to map a relative ranking for each stretch of highway. Some criteria might be weighted as more important other criteria.
    - Justin noted that Deb Wambach had shared the following comments:
        - Non-governmental organizations might have data that the agencies aren't aware of. There's a need to seek data from both agency and NGO sources, and be aware of strengths and limitations of the data.
        - It may not be possible to map community and landowner interest so that could be a second step in the prioritization process.
        - Similarly, engineering feasibility would occur later in the process – identify areas where there's a need for wildlife accommodations and then the engineers can figure out where an accommodation is feasible.
        - It is important to identify wildlife and transportation needs based on conservation and safety irrespective of MDT's program planning horizon. For example, some wildlife and transportation needs can be rolled into projects that come online in the future and some needs may warrant a stand alone project

lead by others outside of the agencies. In either case, alternative funding sources will increase the chance for success.

- Paul mentioned average daily traffic (ADT) and if there is low ADT, there is probably not a high need for any wildlife accommodations aside from fencing. Also, they consider nighttime versus daytime traffic.
- Justin wondered if future traffic volume fit under the prioritization framework or if it would fit better at a later stage to help determine the type of wildlife accommodation.
- Liz noted that future traffic volume is important because it affects wildlife passage and collisions. In road ecology literature, this is known as a bell curve (low traffic= high passage, low collisions; medium traffic= high passage, high collisions; high traffic=low passage/low crossing attempts, low collisions).
- Brian explained the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program is not the right data source for future projects. Instead, the group should use the Tentative Construction Projects (TCP) data and Active Projects data would because these are continually maintained and not annual snapshots. https://mdt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=8a296611c11b4eecba0d647842510ccb Traffic data are also available on MDT's site, and they have future forecast data for traffic volume.
- Justin asked Liz a follow up question on how she sees the role of future traffic volume in prioritizing areas for accommodations.
- Liz responded that if there is an area that is important for wildlife connectivity that has low traffic but volume is expected to increase, there is a chance it could become an absolute barrier and wildlife accommodations should be considered.
- Justin asked if planning should incorporate the projected traffic trends as well as current traffic volume when considering prioritization. All agreed.
- Paul explained there is current traffic volume, which is a barrier now and requires more weight, but projected future traffic volume should also be included in the analysis, especially because the lifespan of projects is 75+ years.
- Andrew suggested there's a need to keep prioritization updated, have short and long-term priorities, i.e. an adaptive management approach. There will be development in future years, so that needs to be accounted for in the mapping/prioritization process.
- Gabe agreed with Liz and Paul. MDT is looking at it from a safety standpoint, and that is, how can we be more proactive from a predictive standpoint to make decisions that will enhance safety?
- Justin asked if MDT has a collision risk index.
- Gabe said MDT is working on it, but have not gotten far enough in the process to start developing a risk matrix. Predictive analyses take time to develop, so it's a couple of years out, but maybe in the future that will be ready and something they can insert. There could be a long-term placeholder.
- Andrew noted that having a set of criteria defined by this work group is necessary, but giving people a say is needed for buy-in to the process and can assist with plan implementation. Collecting point information such as collision and carcass data as well as where live animals or no animals are recorded adjacent to roadways, might be an opportunity for NGOs to help with data collection, which can be useful for modelling or targeting approaches, as well as working towards local support and implementation into the future.

- Brian said the group needs to think about the intended audience as that will inform the right maps and applications. Also, the group needs to think through how the maps and applications will be maintained and supported over the long term.
- Gabe noted this will be an ongoing conversation as we look at our long-term goals (where we want to be) and what do we have right now (our gaps and limitations). Looking at the data they have, for instance, it's hard to pull out species—can identify where there was a collision, but harder to determine if it was an elk or a grizzly bear without having to dive into the more tightly held crash reports. This should be framed in the context of available data.
- Paul noted that for carcass and collision data, they don't need to know whether it was an elk or a bear. That's where FWP's collar data can inform some of those questions when we overlay data.
- Liz commented that with crash records, if there's no species information available, then we have to work with what we have, but there is value in being able to identify species. She asked if salvage permits should be added as another data source.
- The group talked about the intended audience as being the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Committee to start, but that it will eventually be shared with the broader public. This will influence the information is shared. For example, there may be a couple versions out of concern for data sensitivity.

3. Work plan

- The group decided on a couple first tasks:
  - Revise the mission statement and criteria, and share the draft with the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee for feedback
  - Once the group has a final list of criteria, work on ranking and weighting the criteria before the next work group meeting.
- Liz volunteered to create a template for a work plan with these initial items.

4. Communication with Steering Committee

- Available work group members will attend the next Steering Committee meeting on August 5 to introduce themselves, provide an update, and solicit feedback on the mission statement and criteria concept.
- The work group will appoint one or more representatives to provide updates at future Steering Committee meetings.

5. Meeting Logistics

- Renee will send a doodle poll for the next meeting to occur in the second half of August.
- The work group requested PIT Crew assistance with organizing meetings, facilitating, and meeting notes.

6. Review and Close

ACTION ITEMS:

- Justin will send out the latest version of the mission and criteria. Work group members will provide edits to Justin by July 24. Then Justin will update the document by July 31 so it can be presented to the Steering Committee at their August 5 meeting.

- Liz will create a template for a work plan, filling in the initial tasks discussed during the meeting.
- The PIT Crew will respond to the work group's request for assistance at the next work group meeting.
- Renee will send out draft meeting notes, a doodle poll for next meeting, and survey the work group members to determine who will present at and attend the Steering Committee meeting on August 5.